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AN EXAMPLE OF CLASSICAL GREEK THOUGHT IN OLD GEORGIAN LITERATURE

Classical Greek thought gradually became popular in the old Georgian literature, predominantly from the 12th century. This popularity is expressed not only in the translation or compilation of maxims of ancient Greek philosophers (“On the Wisdom of Plato the Philosopher”, “On The Wisdom of Many Philosophers”, “Scholarly Words and Teachings”), but by the introduction of Classical themes and motifs, the quotation of Greek authors and characters of their works in old Georgian philosophical (Ioane Petrisi) and historical (the historian of David the Builder, the historian of Queen Tamar) literature, in encomiast lyrics (Chakhrukhadze, Shavteli) and in epic (Rustaveli). In this respect Rustaveli’s *The Man in the Panther’s Skin* is unique. Classical enters it as the style of thought – not only as a literary or philosophical source of the author but as thought of the epoch. Revival of the Classical and its introduction to Christian thought corresponded to the new world perception paving the way for the Renaissance of European civilization.

In the Prologue to *The Man in the Panther’s Skin* Rustaveli sets forth a theory on moral and physical qualities of an ideal personality. “To a lover, beauty, glorious beauty, wisdom, wealth, youth and leisure are fitting: he must be eloquent, intelligent, patient, an overcomer of mighty adversaries; who has not all these qualities lacks the character of a lover” (quatrain 8)¹.

The ethical-philosophical term *motsaleoba* (‘leisure’ in Wardrop’s translation) in the quoted quatrain is worthy of special notice. In my view, it corresponds to the Greek ἡ σχολή//σχολά in Old Georgian philosophical- theological writings, retaining the same philosophical meaning it had in Classical literature, and later in the corresponding Latin term *otium* in Renaissance and new- period European thought.

The principal meaning of *motsaleoba* or *motsaleba* in Old Georgian was ‘leisure’. Hence this is the way the word in *The Man in the Panther’s Skin* is explained by old commentators of the poem as well as by modern researcher-lexicologists. On the other hand, inasmuch as Rustaveli considers *motsaleoba* to be one of the obligatory qualities of a lover as an ideal person, some researchers rightly questioned the explanation of the term as ‘leisure’, explaining it instead as ‘appropriateness’, ‘parity’, ‘equality’², while others defined it as ‘steadiness’, ‘lack of haste’, ‘calm’.³ As these differing explanations seemed unconvincing to me, I consider the traditional linking of Rustaveli’s *motsaleoba* to the verb *motsaleba//motsla* to be quite correct. At the same time, in my view, among the virtues necessary for a lover as an ideal knight *motsaleoba* should not be taken in the sense of ‘free time’, ‘leisure’, but in the meaning of finding time for the loved one, acting for the lover, knowing love as an activity – in the sense of thinking over it, ‘figuring it out’⁴. A couple of cases occur in the scholarly literature of recent years in which researchers into *The Man in the Panther’s Skin* give preference in explaining *motsaleoba* to its interpretation as ‘appropriateness’, ‘parity’, ‘equality’.

This recent trend of commentators of *The Man in the Panther’s Skin* would seem natural. In modern Georgian the word *motsaleba//motsaleoba* has almost lost the meaning it often had in old written sources (‘having time for something’: ‘activity towards something’). Now, Rustaveli studies has

¹ *The Man in the Panther’s Skin*, a romantic epic by Shota Rustaveli, a close rendering from the Georgian attempted by Marjory Scott Wardrop, London, 1912 (1966). p.2. Quotations hereinafter will be from this book.

² Imedashvili, G., *The motsaleoba of The Man in the Panther’s Skin*, in Shota Rustaveli (Jubilee collection of the Institute of Georgian Literature), Tbilisi, p. 1966, p. 293 (in Georgian).

³ Danelia, K. On the vocabulary of *The Man in the Panther’s Skin*, coll. papers *Orioni*, Tbilisi, 1967, pp 149-151 (in Georgian).

⁴ Khintibidze, E., One ethical concept of *The Man in the Panther’s Skin*, Bull, Georgian Acad. Sci, 1968, 52, N1, pp.263-267. See also Khintibidze, E., Weltanschauung problems in *The Man in The Panther’s Skin*, Tbilisi, 1975, pp. 295-306 (in Georgian).

demonstrated that 'leisure', 'having free time' cannot be an indispensable quality of an ideal lover. On the other hand, as Rustaveli discusses love theoretically, it would seem natural for him to say that lovers should be appropriate for each other. The more so that Rustaveli was an ideologue of feudal society and he should of course sing to the love of a socially fitting couple. However, if we want to determine the meaning of this controversial concept by such general analytical discourse, we should perhaps see whether the theoretical discourse of the Prologue to *The Man in the Panther's Skin* contains a statement to the effect that the lover should choose an object of love that is suitable for him (in beauty, character, age, education, social status, etc.)? No such statement is to be found in the Prologue. An opposite view may be discerned: "his heart must be fixed on one from whom he endures wrath or sorrow if need be" (quatrain 10).

As noted above, the lexical unit *motsaleoba* and related words *motsale* and *motsaleba*, formed with the preverb *mo* from the root *tsal*, in Old Georgian meant: 1. Leisure, having free time: 2. Having time for something (largely: mental- cognitive or divine-mystic contemplation; having free time for definite (chiefly cognitive) activity, study.⁵

An opportunity presents itself of getting closer to Rustaveli's time. In his original work, *The Miracles of the Holy Protomartyr Giorgi*, Tbel Abuserisdze, a Georgian writer of the first half of the 13th century, tells the story of St. Giorgi appearing before Basili the stone mason, surnamed *Bolok-Basili*, who had gone to work at some distance from his own house in order to earn livelihood for his household, and saying to him": *nu gakuns motsalebai mosaretseliatvis siglakhakisa shenisa da agh-mishene tadzari khelta mier oden shenta*⁶ ("Do not direct your activity to earning your poor livelihood and build me a church with your own hand"). Clearly, *motsaleba* in the oral speech of the Georgian writer flourishing in Tbeti in Rustaveli's time meant "having time for something" "devoting time to something", "activity towards attaining something". In this specific case this "something" is livelihood to escape one's own poverty.

In *The Man in the Panther's Skin* the lexical units derived from the root *tsal* by means of the preverb *mo* have the sole meaning of 'leisure' or 'having time for something'. Besides the case under discussion (*siqme da motsaleoba*) the following usages occur in the poem: *misgan kide nurad odes moetslebis*. ("He will have time for nothing but to think of her" (31), *mostsaldal sitqvisa tkmad agharisdad* ("...he could by no means bring himself to speak a word (to Taniel)") (86); *monakhet, dzebnet igi qma, skhvad nurad moitslideta* ("Go, spare yourselves no pains: search, hunt for that youth, let nothing hinder you" (115); *ar mostsaldal chvretad matda* ("...he rested not from gazing at him") (847); *vachrobisa sakmisagan movitsalit, igi vnakhit* ("when we had leisure from affairs of trade we used to see her") (1140).

To revert to the quatrain (8) under discussion. It should be noted at first that Rustaveli's theory of love is not set forth in this quatrain, more precisely, it does not deal with the attitude the lovers should have to each other. Hence it should not be assumed that *motsaleoba* means appropriateness, i.e. that the lovers should fit each other as a couple. The quatrain is devoted to listing the ideal qualities of the lover as an ideal man or knight (not of the woman), and such a teaching about man's ideal qualities was prevalent both in Classical thought and in chivalrous ethic. That this quatrain is devoted to listing the bodily and moral merits of an ideal person - a knight in love - is seen also from the fact that the majority of qualities listed here (wisdom, wealth, generosity, intelligence, patience, "overcoming mighty adversaries") occur in Aristotle's ethical teaching on man's spiritual and physical virtue. In the same doctrine Aristotle assigned a place to the process of knowing, the time spent in cognitive activity; the time allotted by man to cognize the most valuable essence for himself; to think over it, and to act over it. Only this object of cognition, this essence to be thought of and acted upon differs from man to man. It is this highest moral virtue of man that is referred to in Aristotle's ethical conception with the Greek word ἡ σχολή that corresponds to the Georgian *motsaleba/motsaleoba*. Let me reiterate that the σχολή of the Greek theological-literary sources of the Byzantine period, and its corresponding verb σχολάζω, are translated into Georgian as *motsaleoba*⁷.

⁵ Khintbidze, E, One ethical concept of *The Man in the Panther's Skin* (indicated *supra*): Kartuli enis ganmartebiti leksikoni - erttomeuli, Tbilisi, 1986; Abuladze I., Old Georgian Dictionary, Tbilisi, 1973, p. 284 (in Georgian).

⁶ Tbel Abuserisdze, *The Miracles of the Holy Protomartyr Giorgi*, in Khalvashi, R., *The Parables of Tbel Abuserisdze*, Batumi, 1998, p. 80 (in Georgian).

⁷ For relevant examples see my above-cited study (Weltanschauung Problems in *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, pp 295-306). In addition, I shall quote another excerpt: in Basil the Great's *Asceticon*, translated by Eprem Mtsire, we find: *da mravali mikhilavs me esevitari da mravali masmies, kholo metsnier arian umetesadgha amis esevitarita motsaleni* (A - 132,2 r). Here is the corresponding passage from the Greek original: καὶ πολλὰ μὲν ἐγὼ τοιαῦτα εἶδον, πολλὰ δὲ ἤκουσα. ἴσασι δὲ

Aristotle gave precedence to *motsaleoba* among the physical and moral virtues of a person. Δοκεῖ τε ἡ εὐδαιμονία ἐν τῇ σχολῇ εἶναι⁸ - And happiness is thought to depend on leisure⁹ - the Greek philosopher wrote. Hence, I believe the *motsaleoba* of *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, as a spiritual virtue of the knight in love should mean finding time (devotion) for love, acting for it, thinking over it, "figuring it out".

The question arises as to the relation of this interpretation of the *motsaleoba* of the Prologue of *The Man in the Panther's Skin* to the other quatrains on love or to the so-called theory of love. In other words, is it seen in the view set forth on love in the poem's Prologue that the lover should be characterized by finding time for love, devotion, thinking over love? The answer to this question must be positive.

The last (31) quatrain of the Prologue reads: "If the lover weep for his beloved, tears are her (?his) due. Wandering and solitude befit him, and must be esteemed as roaming. He will have time for nothing but to think of her".

It is clear from this quatrain that the lover should have time only for his own beloved one, and that this "having time" must be manifested in solitude and thinking of her. My interpretation of Rustaveli's *motsaleoba* finds corroboration in one more quatrain (18): "With what Fate gives to a man, therewithal should he be content, and so (?contentedly) speak of it. The labourer should ever work, the warrior be brave. So, also, should the lover love Love, and recognize it. Who judges not will not be judged by others".

It is clear from this that Rustaveli considers the lover's activity to think about love, to figure love out; the lover should love Love and recognize it. Thus, the meaning of the Greek ἡ σχολή and its corresponding Georgian *motsaleoba* is to use one's leisure time for learning, thinking and philosophizing. According to Aristotle the highest type of cognitive activity is *motsaleoba* - σχολή (Eth. Nic. X,7)

This view of the lover's activity, as formulated in the Prologue and such interpretation of *motsaleoba* or moral perfection of an ideal knight found reflection in the literary images of the enamoured knights of Rustaveli's poem. The main activity of the life and actions of Tariel and Avtandil is finding time for love, devotion to love: thinking about love; love of Love and figuring it out. The characters of the poem live with this philosophy. This, too, is a Classical principle of thought: Philosopher is not he who philosophizes but lives philosophically. This principle accords with the world perception of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. In his treatise "On the Highest Good", the well-known Aristotelian Boetius of Dacia wrote: "I call a philosopher each man who lives according to the real rule of nature"¹⁰.

Aristotle's above-discussed teaching on interpreting σχολή - *motsaleoba* as the highest bliss of man did not remain a view of this single Greek philosopher. It had its continuation not only in Classical philosophy and medieval Aristotelianism but, generally, in the process of European civilization. Nor was the reinterpretation in the Greek language of σχολή - *motsaleoba* from leisure/free time into learning, study, philosophical-cognitive activity, which commenced from the Hellenistic period¹¹, a local phenomenon. This, too, had its continuation and development in European civilization.

ἡ σχολή and its Latin correspondence *otium* acquired Aristotelian sounding in Renaissance period Europe. Italian humanists paid attention to the fact that genuine *otium* was not merely 'leisure' or 'Free time' but 'activity in leisure'.¹² It was revealed also that the highest order of activity in leisure was remaining with oneself and thinking, reasoning. Humanists of the Renaissance period were well aware that to become a humanist it was necessary to enjoy freedom in order to manage one's own personality and one's free time¹³. It is also said that "Petrarca had no other more important and attractive object for thought than his self"¹⁴.

Thus, the Greek word σχολή/σχολά, to which corresponds *motsaleba/motsaleoba* in Old Georgian literature, was gradually reinterpreted - under the influence of ancient Greek philosophy from

καὶ πλείονα οἱ περὶ ταῦτα ἠσχολημένοι..PG, 31, 656. cf. the Russian translation: "Подобно сему много и видел я, много и слышал, но еще более моего знают занимавшиеся этим" ("Творения Василия Великого", 5, 1847).

⁸ Aristotelis opera omnia, vol. secundum, Parisiis, 1883, 124.

⁹ *The Works of Aristotle*. Translated into English under the editorship of W.D. Ross, v. IX, Oxford, 1975, 1977a.

¹⁰ Zubov, V. Aristotle, Moscow, 1963, p. 145 (in Russian).

¹¹ Mikkola E., Scholē bei Aristoteles. - Arctos nova series, vol.II, Acta Philologica fennica, Helsinki, 1958, S.68; El. Welskopt, Probleme der Musse im alten Hellas, Berlin 1962, S. 61.

¹² Batkin L., Italian Humanists: Life Style, Style of Thought, Moscow, 1978, pp. 24-25 (in Russian).

¹³ Ibid., p.26.

¹⁴ Ibid., P.28.

the meaning of 'leisure' or 'free time' into *mental activity, study, cognition*. In modern European civilization it became established in the form and meaning of school. This process of reinterpretation is perceptible – with various shades – in Byzantine literature, Renaissance-period European thought, and in Old Georgian literature as well. In *The Man in The Panther's Skin* this concept is rendered – following in the wake of Old Georgian theological writings – by the term *motsaleoba*, and conformably to Classical Greek ethical thought, it has its legitimate place assigned among the indispensable physical and spiritual virtues of an ideal knight in love.